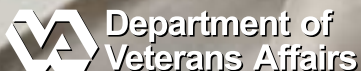


# Veterans' Health Today

S U M M E R 2 0 0 2



Quality of care  
receives high marks

Protect yourself  
from fraud

Understanding  
osteoporosis

# Quality of care receives high marks

Recent reports show the healthcare veterans receive from VA is comparable to—and often better than—care provided by private healthcare organizations. VA data from 18 indicators of quality patient care were compared with similar information from managed care organizations (HMOs), government sources and population-based surveys. For 16 of 18 indicators, VA outcomes exceed the “best reported” performance data measured by a variety of national healthcare quality groups.

“VA healthcare has come a long way in its more than 50 years of existence,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony J. Principi. “This is a new VA, substantially different, profoundly better and a recognized leader in providing quality healthcare. These data, in part, explain why so many more veterans are coming to us for their care.”

The data, listed in the chart, cover a wide range of care, from diabetes and hypertension to cancer screening and immunizations. With a focus on preventive care, for example, VA provided screening for cervical cancer 89 percent of the time, compared with the national average of 78 percent. For diabetic patients, VA examined patients’ kidney function 72 percent of the time, compared to a national rate of 46 percent.

However, clinical data only tell a portion of the story. For the second year in a row, independent surveys also confirm that patient satisfaction scores for VA outpatient care top those received by private healthcare providers.

Indicator	VA average	Best competitor
Advised smokers to quit at least once in past year	93%	66% NCQA
Beta-blocker prescribed on discharge after heart attack	94%	92% MMCP
Breast cancer screening	80%	75% MMCP
Cervical cancer screening	89%	78% NCQA
Cholesterol screening in all patients	88%	69% BRFSS(1)
Cholesterol measured after heart attack <sup>2</sup>	89%	76% NCQA
LDL cholesterol < 130 after heart attack <sup>3</sup>	71%	57% NCQA
Colorectal cancer screening	60%	44% BRFSS(2)
Diabetes: HgbA1c test done in past year	93%	84% MMCP
Diabetes: Poor control <sup>4</sup> (lower number is better)	20%	43% NCQA
Diabetes: Cholesterol (LDLC) measured	91%	84% MMCP
Diabetes: Cholesterol (LDLC) controlled (< 130)	68%	46% NCQA
Diabetes: Eye exam	66%	68% MMCP
Diabetes: Renal (kidney) exam	72%	46% NCQA
Hypertension: BP ≤ 140/90 most recent visit <sup>5</sup>	57%	52% NCQA
Immunizations: influenza, patients 65 and older <sup>6</sup>	73%	75% MMCP
Immunizations: pneumococcal, patients 65 and older <sup>7</sup>	79%	46% NHS
Mental health follow-up within 30 days of hospitalization	84%	73% NCQA

<sup>1</sup> BRFSS (CDC’s Behavior Risk Factor Surveillance System) scores are *median*; VA scores are *average*.

<sup>2</sup> VA ongoing annually; NCQA 1\* year after myocardial infarction (heart attack) only.

<sup>3</sup> VA ongoing annually; NCQA 1\* year after myocardial infarction (heart attack) only.

<sup>4</sup> Diabetes: poor control defined by VA ≥ 9.5; NCQA > 9.5 values for most recent HgbA1c.

<sup>5</sup> VA includes all ages; NCQA includes ages 46–85.

<sup>6</sup> This VA number matches NCQA methodology to exclude high-risk patients younger than 65.

<sup>7</sup> VA includes high-risk patients less than 65 in this number; comparative data indicate that despite high risk for those with chronic illness, patients under 65 have a lower rate of immunization.

## Veterans 'delighted' with care

By Teresa Osborn

The VA Desert Pacific Healthcare Network is proud to announce that we are one of the top performers in the country on the outpatient veteran satisfaction measure called the Delight Index. Throughout the VA, we achieved one of the highest scores on three measures of satisfaction.

- Overall, patients rate the quality of care received in the past two months as excellent.
- They had no complaints about the care they received in the past two months.
- If they could receive free care outside the VA, patients would choose to come to us again.

We are “delighted” with these results and continue to strive to honor our veterans with the best possible compassionate care.

# *Help for anxiety*

By Louise Mahoney

**A**nxiety can be good: It rouses you to action and gears you up to face a threatening situation. It can make you study harder for that exam and keeps you on your toes when you're making a speech. In general, anxiety helps you cope.

However, if you suffer from an anxiety disorder, this normally helpful emotion can do just the opposite—it can keep you from coping and disrupt your daily life. Anxiety disorders are the most common mental illnesses in America. This devastating disease affects more than 19 million people each year and often goes undiagnosed.

## **Several types**

The different kinds of anxiety disorders include:

- **panic disorder:** repeated episodes of intense fear that strike often and without warning

- **post-traumatic stress disorder:** persistent symptoms that occur after experiencing or witnessing a traumatic event

- **social phobia:** an overwhelming and disabling fear of scrutiny, embarrassment or humiliation in social situations

- **specific phobia:** extreme, disabling and irrational fear of something that poses little or no actual danger

- **generalized anxiety disorder:** constant, exaggerated worrisome thoughts and tension about everyday life events and activities, lasting at least six months



- **obsessive-compulsive disorder:** repeated unwanted thoughts or compulsive behaviors that seem impossible to stop or control

Often, anxiety disorders accompany other illnesses such as cancer or heart disease. In such instances, the associated illnesses must be treated as well. It is very important to have a thorough medical examination to rule out other possible causes or symptoms of anxiety.

## **Getting help for anxiety**

If you or someone you know has symptoms of anxiety, start by visiting your primary care physician. He or she can help determine whether the symptoms are due to an anxiety disorder, some other medical condition or both. The best treatment for anxiety is a combination of cognitive/behavioral therapy and medication. It is most important to find a therapist who has specialized training in this area—

not all do. Your VA healthcare center has an excellent staff of mental health professionals ready to help eligible veterans.

People with anxiety disorders and/or depression often turn to drugs or alcohol to cope with their illness. They may develop a dependence on one or more substances, resulting in additional problems. It is important to recognize the signs of substance abuse and obtain treatment for this as well.

The support of family and friends is important in the treatment and recovery of a person with an anxiety disorder. If family tends to make light of the disorder or demand improvement without treatment, the affected person will suffer. Having loved ones understand the anxiety disorder and enlisting their help is key.

*Portions of this article were provided by the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) and the Mental Illness Research, Education and Clinical Center (MIRECC) of the VA Desert Pacific Healthcare Network.*



# Protect yourself from fraud



**A**s the older population grows, the spotlight on fraud and abuse directed at older adults becomes brighter. It is important that you trust your feelings and protect yourself and your family from various scams.

■ **Money fraud:** Never take cash from your bank account if a stranger tells you to do so. If a deal seems too good to be true, it probably is. Beware of any deal that asks you to provide a lot of money up front and guarantees a sure success. Check with your local Better Business Bureau if you have any question or suspicion.

■ **Mail fraud:** If you are notified that you won any contest, don't believe it until you receive a check. You should never have to pay money to receive money—this is a sure indication of fraud. If you have any questions, contact the Postal Service Mail Fraud Complaint Center at **1-800-876-7060**.

■ **Telemarketing fraud:** Never give your credit card or bank account number to anyone who calls to sell a product or asks for a contribution.

■ **Equity fraud:** Never sign a contract until you have read the fine print or consulted with a reputable attorney or a trusted person. If your home requires needed work, never use your home as

collateral and always hire a contractor that is licensed, bonded and insured. Always check with a reputable attorney.

■ **Health fraud:** Beware of quick fixes or miracle cures for health problems offered on TV or through a telemarketer. Avoid special items only available by mail or from one supplier. Beware of free hearing tests or hearing aids where suppliers try to collect through your insurance company. Never schedule a test in your home. Check with your doctor before you buy anything and, when

you do, go through a licensed professional.

■ **Bogus telephone and credit card charges:** Check your telephone bill and credit card bills carefully each month. If you enter any contest or sweepstakes, read the fine print carefully to verify you are not authorizing charges to your telephone.

If you suspect that you or a family member has been the victim of fraud or abuse, contact your local Adult Protective Services or Area Agency on Aging for assistance and protection.

## Be on the lookout

**F**riends and loved ones may be the first to notice signs of fraud and exploitation. Some signs are:

- frequent gifts from elder to caregiver
- elder's personal belongings, papers or credit cards missing
- numerous unpaid bills
- a recent will written when elder is incapable of writing
- caregiver's name added to bank account
- elder unaware of monthly income or signs a loan
- frequent checks made out to cash
- unusual activity in bank account
- irregularities on tax return
- elder unaware of appointment with banker or attorney
- caregiver's refusal to spend money on elder
- signatures on checks or legal documents that do not resemble elder's signature



# We salute our volunteers

## Thomas and Genevieve Lamb A gift of support for San Diego veterans

By John A. Stewart

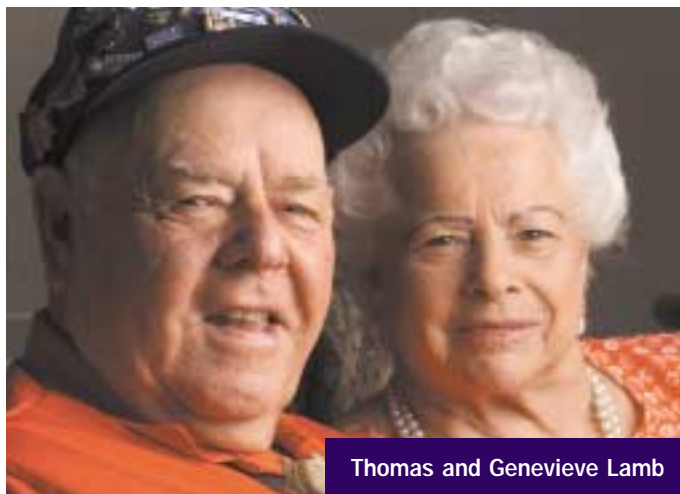
**T**homas and Genevieve Lamb have a long history of supporting veterans in San Diego. Tom, a native of San Diego, enlisted in the Navy in 1942 and was assigned to the U.S.S. Princeton, a converted carrier. The Princeton was torpedoed in the Gulf of Leyte in October 1944, and

Tom was thrust overboard when the Princeton exploded. He spent four hours in the water.

In 1946, Tom was discharged and immediately returned to San Diego. He has been active in the veteran community for years and is past post commander for the DAV and the American Legion and is the current commander of VFW Post 5431.

Genevieve was inspired to help veterans after her seven brothers served in the military. Her father was also an active veteran for 38 years. When the San Diego VA Medical Center opened in 1972, Genevieve was one of the first to volunteer. She currently helps at the VA Mission Valley Clinic, where she has accumulated more than 32,000 hours of service during the past 30 years.

Tom has been a volunteer at the Medical Center in La Jolla as a van driver and has logged more than 22,000 hours of service. He was one of the first van drivers and is the only original driver remaining from the program's start in 1986. What's more, Tom has volunteered at all VA



Thomas and Genevieve Lamb

San Diego Stand Down Programs for the past 14 years.

Besides their regularly scheduled assignments with VA, both Tom and Genevieve are active in various other community organizations. Tom loves the VA and says veterans "couldn't get better care than that available here in San Diego." His dedication

to veterans is unyielding. "We need to help those who served," he says. "That is my commitment to San Diego veterans."

## Honoring volunteers

National Volunteer Week was celebrated throughout the VA Desert Pacific Healthcare Network April 21-27. During the week, we recognized and celebrated the efforts of volunteers throughout our facilities.

This year's theme was "Celebrate the American Spirit: Volunteer!" National Volunteer Week showed the world that helping is healing for our country and encouraged people to help make a positive change in the lives of others.

To learn more about volunteering, please call your local VA healthcare facility and ask for Voluntary Services.

# Understanding *osteoporosis*

By Todd P. Semla, Pharm.D.

**O**steoporosis has been called the silent disease because bone loss generally occurs without symptoms. You may not know that you have the disease until a sudden strain or fall causes a fracture or vertebra to collapse. The best way to diagnose osteoporosis is to measure bone density or bone mineral content.

## Who is at risk

Osteoporosis is most common among older women. About 9.4 million women in the U.S. suffer from osteoporosis while another 16.8 million women have below-normal bone density.

Advanced age is a well-known risk factor for both men and women, and the disease is more common in postmenopausal women because of the loss of the female hormone estrogen. Other risk factors for women include premature menopause, ovary removal without hormone replacement therapy, strenuous exercise causing a cessation of the menstrual cycle, small body frame, excessive use of



alcohol and cigarettes, low intake of calcium and high intake of protein. Men generally suffer as a result of low levels of the male hormone testosterone and chronic alcoholism. A family history increases the risk of osteoporosis for both men and women.

## How it is diagnosed

Osteoporosis can only be diagnosed by measuring bone density. A simple test, much like an X-ray, uses a very low dose of radiation to measure the bone density in the

spine, hip, wrist or heel. Your doctor should always measure your bone density before starting you on any medications. All VA Desert Pacific Healthcare Network facilities offer this test.

## What you can do

Your risk for osteoporosis can be reduced by doing weight-bearing exercise such as walking, jogging, weight-lifting or playing a sport such as tennis. Make sure you get enough calcium and vitamin D. Postmenopausal women should consume 1,200 mg of calcium every day, and people 51 to 70 years old should take 400 IU of vitamin D daily. Those 71 and older should get 600 IU daily of vitamin D.

If you have further questions, contact your healthcare provider; the National Osteoporosis Foundation at **202-223-2226** or **www.nof.org**; or the National Institutes of Health, Osteoporosis and Related Bone Diseases National Resource Center at **202-223-0344, 800-624-BONE** or at **www.oste.org**.

### VA Desert Pacific Healthcare Network Vet Centers

#### Anaheim Vet Center

859 South Harbor Boulevard  
Anaheim, CA 92805-5157  
562-596-3101

#### Corona Vet Center

800 Magnolia Avenue, Suite 110  
Corona, CA 92879  
909-734-0525

#### East Los Angeles Vet Center

5400 E. Olympic Boulevard, Suite 140  
Commerce, CA 90022-5147  
213-728-9966

#### Las Vegas Vet Center

1040 E. Sahara Avenue, Suite 1  
Las Vegas, NV 89503  
702-388-6369

#### Los Angeles Vet Center

1045 W. Redondo Beach Boulevard  
Suite 150  
Gardena, CA 90247-4129  
310-767-1221

#### San Bernardino Vet Center

155 W. Hospitality Lane, Suite 140  
San Bernardino, CA 92480  
909-890-0797

#### San Diego Vet Center

2900 Sixth Avenue  
San Diego, CA 92103-1003  
619-294-2040

#### Santa Barbara Vet Center

1300 Santa Barbara Street  
Santa Barbara, CA 93101-2017  
805-564-2345

#### Sepulveda Vet Center

9737 Haskell Avenue  
Sepulveda, CA 91343-1618  
818-892-9227

#### Vista Vet Center

1830 West Drive, Suites 103/104  
Vista, CA 92083-6125  
760-643-2070

#### West Los Angeles Vet Center

5730 Uplander Way, Suite 100  
Culver City, CA 90230-6615  
310-641-0326



# VA TeleCare:

*Helping you make healthy decisions*

**I**t is difficult to answer most questions about your health on your own, especially when you think you may need immediate medical care. That's why the VA Desert Pacific Healthcare Network provides VA TeleCare, a telephone care line. The program offers confidential answers to your health questions completely free of charge. TeleCare provides most all information you need to help you make the right decision about your healthcare.

The TeleCare Line is available 24 hours a day, every day. When you call the toll-free number at **1-877-252-4866**, you will be speaking with a nurse. If you are feeling ill or have been injured, our nurse can give you medical advice, help you make an

appointment to see a primary care provider or even tell you what you and your family can do at home to help take care of your problem.

When you call the TeleCare nurse, you may be referred to the emergency room for treatment. If the nurse says you are too ill to safely make a trip to the VA medical center's emergency room, immediately call 911 for help. Emergency paramedics will be dispatched to your home.

Whether you need medical advice or just have questions, VA TeleCare staff is here to help! The peak hours of operation are Monday through Saturday, 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. Remember: If you have a medical issue, do not wait until 8 a.m. to call.



## Means test required for VA care

**N**onservice-connected and 0 percent service-connected veterans are required to submit an annual means test. As of this spring, VA medical centers are unable to schedule a future appointment unless a current means test is on file.

The means test collects information about a veteran's income and assets to establish the priority level for medical care co-payments. To make sure your care is not interrupted, follow these guidelines:

- If you receive a means test form in the mail, complete and return it to the medical center within a week.
- Make sure to notify the Enrollment Office at your local VA medical center or the medical clerk at your clinic appointment of any address changes.
- If you have a scheduled medical appointment and have not filed a current means test, plan to arrive at least 30 minutes before your appointment to com-

plete the form. You will be required to complete the form before you see your medical provider.

For more information about completing a means test, please call:

- **VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System**  
310-268-3290
- **VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System**  
702-636-3000, ext. 3555
- **VA Long Beach Healthcare System**  
562-826-8000, ext. 2993
- **VA Loma Linda Healthcare System**  
909-825-7084, ext. 2043
- **VA San Diego Healthcare System**  
858-552-4364

# REACHING US IS EASY

## ★ VA Medical Centers

### VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System

Addelir D. Guy III  
Ambulatory Care Center  
1700 Vegas Drive  
Las Vegas, NV 89106  
702-636-3000

### Mike O'Callaghan Federal Hospital

4700 Las Vegas Boulevard North  
Las Vegas, NV 89191  
702-653-3684

### VA Loma Linda Healthcare System

11201 Benton Street  
Loma Linda, CA 92357  
909-825-7084

### VA Long Beach Healthcare System

5901 East Seventh Street  
Long Beach, CA 90822  
562-826-8000

### VA San Diego Healthcare System

3350 La Jolla Village Drive  
San Diego, CA 92161  
858-552-8585

### VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System

11301 Wilshire Boulevard  
Los Angeles, CA 90073  
310-478-3711

## ▲ VA Community Clinics

### Anaheim

1801 W. Romneya Drive  
3rd Floor, Suite 303  
Anaheim, CA 92801  
714-780-5400

### Antelope Valley

45120 60th St. West  
Lancaster, CA 93536  
661-723-6373

### Bakersfield

1801 Westwind Drive  
Bakersfield, CA 93301  
661-632-1871

### Cabrillo

2001 River Avenue  
Long Beach, CA 90806  
562-388-7900



### Symbol Key

- ★ VA Medical Centers
- ▲ Community-Based Outpatient Clinics

### Chula Vista (South Bay)

835 3rd Avenue  
Chula Vista, CA 91910  
619-409-1600

### Corona

800 Magnolia Avenue #101  
Corona, CA 92879  
909-817-8820

### Culver City

3831 Hughes Avenue, Suite 104  
Culver City, CA 90232  
310-202-8223

### East Los Angeles

5400 E. Olympic Boulevard #150  
City of Commerce, CA 90040  
323-725-7557

### Escondido

815 East Pennsylvania Avenue  
Escondido, CA 92025  
760-745-2000

### Gardena

1251 Redondo Beach Boulevard  
3rd Floor  
Gardena, CA 90247  
310-851-4705

### Henderson

2920 N. Green Valley Parkway  
Suite 215  
Henderson, NV 89014  
702-456-3825

### Imperial Valley

528 G Street  
Brawley, CA 92227  
760-344-1881

### Las Vegas

MASH Village  
1581 N. Main Street  
Las Vegas, NV 89101  
702-386-3140

### Lompoc

1111 E. Ocean Avenue, Suite 8  
Lompoc, CA 93436  
805-736-7767

### Los Angeles

351 E. Temple Street  
Los Angeles, CA 90012  
213-253-5000

### Mission Valley

8810 Rio San Diego Drive  
San Diego, CA 92108  
619-400-5000

### Oxnard

250 W. Citrus Grove Avenue  
Suite 150  
Oxnard, CA 93030  
805-983-6384

### Palm Desert

41-865 Boardwalk, Suite 103  
Palm Desert, CA 92211  
760-341-5570

### VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System

### Pahrump Medical Center

1430 E. Calvada Boulevard  
Suite 100  
Pahrump, NV 89048  
775-751-2053

### Pasadena

1350 North Altadena Drive  
Pasadena, CA 91107  
626-296-9500

### San Luis Obispo

1288 Morro Street  
Suite 200  
San Luis Obispo, CA 93401  
805-546-1830

### Santa Ana

Bristol Medical Center  
2740 S. Bristol Street  
1st Floor, Suite 101  
Santa Ana, CA 92704  
714-825-3500

### Santa Barbara

4440 Calle Real  
Santa Barbara, CA 93110  
805-683-1491

### Sepulveda

16111 Plummer Street  
Sepulveda, CA 91343  
818-891-7711

### Sun City

28125 Bradley Road  
Suite 130  
Sun City, CA 92586  
909-672-1931

### Upland

1238 E. Arrow Highway, No. 100  
Upland, CA 91786  
909-946-5348

### Victorville

12138 Industrial Boulevard  
Suite 120  
Victorville, CA 92392  
760-951-2599

### Vista

1840 West Drive  
Vista, CA 92083  
760-643-2000

### Whittier/Santa Fe Springs

10210 Orr and Day Road  
Santa Fe Springs, CA 90670  
562-864-5565

## Veterans' Health Today

5901 E. 7th St.  
Long Beach, CA 90822

VA Desert Pacific Healthcare Network  
announces the opening of a new  
VA community clinic in Pasadena:

VA Pasadena Clinic  
1350 North Altadena Drive  
Pasadena, CA 91107  
626-296-9500

PRSRT STD  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
Lebanon Junction, KY  
PERMIT 19